

INTERVIEW WITH CECELIA KOCHISS BURDETT '39 ON 20 FEBRUARY 1986

Allen: This is Thursday morning, the 20th of Feb., 1986 and I am talking with Cecelia Kochiss Burdett. Now you were a member of what class?

Burdett: '39

Allen: Class of '39 and what do you remember most about that class?

Burdett: I guess the fun we had and the wonderful rapport. We were a very close group, friends, not only classmates. We all seemed to enjoy doing things and knew each other quite well which was just great, in effect, we were small.

Allen: All right, you showed me a picture of the freshmen class which was quite large, do you remember approx. how many?

Burdett: No, I haven't any idea. I was amazed to see the size of it too.

Allen: And then you graduated with how many?

Burdett: It looks like 39 .

Allen: 39

Burdett: Or 36, I guess

Allen: I counted 34 but maybe -

Burdett: That could be, I just counted the first nine and timesed it by four

Allen: The different numbers.

Burdett: Quick arithmetic.

Allen: O.K. I noticed that there is a Russell Cody in your class. The Codys sent quite a few people to the Jr. College, didn't they?

Burdett: I read somewhere in some of this that there were five sons and I have a feeling that most all of them were there.

Allen: Yes, and the first one, as a matter of fact , was a member of the first class and went on to Columbia where he won honors. He was one of the forerunners of this , here we are, Russell Cody was the best looking boy and the fifth of five

brothers to be graduated from the Jr. College. In the same picture, these are class day honors, you were the most popular and the best student among a host of other awards. What other awards?

Burdett: I haven't any idea, Bill. There were so few of us that, you know, they had to spread things around.

Allen: Also, in the picture is Carolyn McEldowney, best looking girl and Wistaria Queen. There is a picture here, you were one of the maids of honor?

Burdett: In the courts, yes.

Allen: In the court, and you have a clipping here that you were initiated into Phi Theta Kappa and that you, with Alice Walsh and Mary Bondaruk went to Lawrence, Oklahoma for the national convention of Phi Theta Kappa. Now in this issue is the national vice president and you eventually became,

Burdett: No because my term at school was over.

Allen: I see, so you became the national vice president of Phi Theta Kappa which is a considerable honor . How did you get that?

Burdett: Well i took these two good friends with me, Mary Bondaruk Hartnett, she is living in Stratford now.

Allen: What was her last name?

Burdett: Her married name is Hartnett now and Alice Walsh is Alice Wideman and she lives in Chatham at the Cape and the three of us were very good friends so we went down together and we decided that we should have an officer from the northeast. There wasn't one so somehow or other they said, "well, you're going to be it" and we'll do all we can . So we did a lot of conniving and promoting this fact that we needed a representative from the northeast and I guess we talked loud enough and hard enough and convinced them .

Allen: Good, that's great . The, you said you were a large class and you enjoyed doing things together. What did you do?

Burdett: Well, in the spring and summer, in the spring and fall, there's many of us who'd run out between classes and play tennis. We had one or two courts in back of the old mansion and then we played bridge. We had fifteen minute breaks between classes and this was absolutly a must in the winter. You would deal out cards the minute you finished a class and start your hand and if you hadn't finished it, you would lock it in your locker and come right back.

Allen: You left the hand in the locker.

Burdett: Our hand, our bridge hand, yes and oh we did that day in and day out. Had a wonderful time doing it. Then we also had a marvelous little infirmary which, thank heavens, was never used by anybody for sickness and I can remember teaching the girls how to play strip poker at that point.

Allen: Oh really!

Burdett: Oh they all wanted to learn and it was the days when we wore our hair up in lots of fancy rolls and had hundreds of bobby pins in your hair so that we would play for these bobby pins, you see, and if we had a class in an hour, it would mean putting your hair back up again, but that was fun.

Allen: Now, where was the infirmary?

Burdett: It was on the second floor of the mansion, just a little room. Then we had sort of a little lunch room, too, and I can remember one of our classmates whose father grew his own grapes would bring in the first wine every year and we discovered and taking that wine into our little lunch room and putting it on the electric plate, warming it with some sugar in it, was the most delicious thing. We did that and we were very friendly after school, you know. We always studied together. I can remember if somebody had a car, that was great. I never did, but somebody would pick a group up and we'd go to someone's house and study together and I know many of them came out to Stratford to study with me. We really had a great time with only the 34 or 36 of us. We were almost always all involved in the same kind of things. I can't remember whether we had a dramatic club, yes we did have a dramatic club. Julia Halsey put on our first play and it was R.U.R. Yes, she came and had us all laughing with green grease paint on, that was fun.

Allen: Now where did you play bridge?

Burdett: We used to play bridge in, well it was the big room downstairs, kind of an assembly room and we had a couple of tables down there and it was amazing how many of us could squeeze around those tables and play bridge between classes.

Allen: This is rather interesting because I have heard a lot of stories about the Men's Club but never knew what the women were doing. The men were playing pinochle in the Men's Club.

Burdett: Well you know, the girls, as I recall, I used to play with the boys very often. We'd play bridge so that you know, it was a mixed group.

Allen: So, we had the pinochle boys in the Men's Club and then

the bridge, which was a mixed group, upstairs in the assembly room on the first floor. The Men's Club, I think. was downstairs in the basement, wasn't it?

Burdett: I don't know, I guess I was never invited. It wouldn't have stopped me but I wasn't aware of it being there.

Allen: What other social activities did you students have?

Burdett: Well, I really can't remember. We kind of made our own fun and that we had. It was just a pleasure being there cause it was being with friends all day. The professors were wonderful.

Allen: O.K., tell us about some of the professors that you had.

Burdett: Well, you got to know them very well because we were so small. Oh, I guess Zampierre is one that I will never forget, anybody who ever had him will never forget him. You would come in, and I'd think, he imbibed, and very often you would smell the wine as you were learning your French.

Allen: He's also referred to as the little old winemaker. And took his lunches at the Subalpino Club.

Burdett: Sure, oh he was fun and Professor Herren was marvelous. He tried so hard to make good accountants of all of us and that was a very lovely room where we had that class. I guess it was a sort of conservatory at one time and the ledges of the windows were very low, they were great big windows that opened out into the driveway.

Allen: This was on the first floor?

Burdett: On the first floor. I will never forget the day I tried my first cigar - somebody had coaxed me and went into his class and had to get out quickly and went out through the window. Terrible, you don't remember nice things, you remember all these awful things.

Allen: Oh, this is wonderful.

Burdett: And Dean Scurr was so great. She knew I was an avid reader. I could sit up all night and read and come to school the next day. She got me interested in the Russians. I read War and Peace twice. I guess I'm one of the few people who have. She had a tremendous collection of Tolstoy, and Dostoyevski the whole gamut of Russian artists and she would bring her books in for me to borrow, and read and return to her and this was a weekly thing.

Allen: This was in part due to the fact that the library was rather small, the Jr. College library.

Burdett: Well, I don't remember a library room. I really don't. I know I used to spend a lot of time at the Bridgeport Public Library. We'd walk down, it was good for us. As we walked up to Landy's Drug Store which took us in the other direction.

Allen: O.K., now where was Landy's Drug Store.

Burdett: It was on the corner of Park and Fairfield. It then became the Women's Drug Store.

Allen: No, you mean Clinton and Fairfield. Now was there a little lunch room across the

Burdett: No, they had it right in drugstore

Allen: No, was there another lunchroom across the street.

Burdett: I don't think so. There was another lunchroom in the other direction, State Street and Park

Allen: Right by the fountain?

Burdett: Near the fountain. There was a little drug store down there too.

Allen: That place, I've forgotten the name of it, was referred to as the "Greasy Spoon" when I came.

Burdett: Could be but I know that that was there too.

Allen: What other instructors did you have?

Burdett: Oh, Professor Ballou. I used to love his class because I was the only girl he would send to the blackboard. He'd have four or five students go up and try and solve problems in different manners and I guess I was always ingenious, probably didn't come up with the right answers but had fun doing it. And I think he got a kick out of it.

Allen: The class size must have been quite small at this time.

Burdett: Oh, it was .

Allen: About how many in a class?

Burdett: Well, it depended. Now probably Professor Herren's class the accounting class might have been ten of us. The English classes were bigger but, I don't know, I guess, in the Math class there were probably five to seven, something like that.

Allen: What other instructors did you have?

Burdett: Gosh, I can't remember.

Allen: Did you have Chamberlain who came about that time?

Burdett: Yes, but I don't remember much about him, I just remember the name and there was another one who came for a short while and went to Stratford to teach, I think, but I can't remember his name. That's about it. Dean Scurr, as I remember, Pat Young's mother used to come and try and, well she did have a choir or course or whatever you want to call it, got us together. She was kind of our music instructor. She was an organist at one of the churches in the city and had a very fine background and Pat had a wonderful voice, so that was fun. We had some music too.

Allen: Any dances?

Burdett: I guess, I was never very fond of dancing so I probably didn't remember that, but I'm quite sure we had an annual party of somekind.

Allen: OK. Cortright you must have know him quite well.

Burdett: Well, yes I did know him for the first year and he left in '38.

Allen: He was ill about that time.

Burdett And then in '39, the Halseys came. Jim Halsey.

Allen: Now, tell us about Jim Halsey.

Burdett: Well, I remember his being so different from Pres. Cortright of course. Young, brash, aggressive and running at all angles because he was so anxious to get things set up and Julia was, she brought us all this drama. That was about all I could remember of Jim. There was that drive there.

Allen: You told me the other day you didn't care for him.

Burdett: Well, I guess he was so busy building up a reputation and getting so well known in the city which he had to do, of course, that he didn't spend very much time with us and so I have really no reason to say I didn't care for him. I did go back to take extra courses for the third year and worked in the office at that time, hoping that I could go on to college but that never materialized. Dad lost everything during the depression, so I was very fortunate to even get to Jr. College. I didn't feel I'd missed anything.

Allen: The, how many people were in the office at this time?

When you were working there?

Burdett: Not very many of us. Do you remember the woman, the big, stout woman who was kind of head office manager?

Allen: Helen Redigan.

Burdett: Yes it was, sure. Your memory is so much better than mine.

Allen: Well, I never knew her because she had gone by the time I came but I know of her from my work.

Burdett: Yes, it was and then I think there was just one other woman so that, I can't remember her name, whether she was full time even, so that they needed a student in there to do a lot of miscellaneous things, mailings, simple things, nothing very much but I became the perienal coed . Then I came over here to take night courses too.

Allen: And what were you taking night courses in then?

Burdett: Well, let's see, I went to work for Milton Friedberg for a while until the war started and then decided I would be of more use, I can't remember if I took accounting courses here or not, I realized my education was sadly neglected so I was talking a lot of cultural courses too probably an art course, that kind of thing, then when the war started I went to Remington to work and took several courses here that I thought would be of assistance. I was in personnel at Remington so I took a lot of things here that I thought might be of assistance. Psychology and a few others.

Allen: But it didn't work out to a degree?

Burdett: No, well over these years, this all didn't happen, you know year after year. They did so much adjusting of my credits and everything, it was a riot. I think they added and subtracted so many I probably came out with a big zero.

Allen: Well you know, when I, shortly after I arrived, I became an evening class advisor and trying to verify the records, the records were in horrible shape, and I had a whole series of people coming in, one to verify their records to see if they were going on and try to make some order out of this. That's how I met my wife, you know. She was my evening class advisee. I advised her very well. She was working at the time and come for further courses in personnel work and then she, will later be in personnel work at Underwood and also at Bright Light Reflector, etc. And then she has done many other things since then.

Burdett: Well I did have trouble with credits and I know I spent



hours here on weekends trying to get them adjusted. And it wasn't easy because some of the courses I took they, couldn't even relate them to anything they had at that time but I had fun, it was a very enjoyable experience.

Allen: Now you subsequently will become involved with the Board of Associates. How long have you been on the Board?

Burdett: Well, I guess it's about three or four years and I don't know how this happened, Bill, cause I was never very active in the alumni association at all. Phil is on the Board at Drew and I seem to do a lot of things with him at Drew, going to even commencements and that sort of thing but I never was very active and suddenly somebody got to me or maybe I sent some money in, you know, for my membership finally and I got a call from John Martin and said "would you be secretary or something like that" and sure why not, it isn't any work and it wasn't and I've been very fortunate that I have had this involvement. So many people on that Board of Associates haven't been tapped for anything and I'm fortunate enough to get all this information on the progress on the university on what's going on.

Allen: And are you currently secretary?

Burdett: No I was treasurer for a while. Right now I'm just on the Executive Committee, I think. At least I get all these nice lunches. Well, I'm going to be chairman of this Founder's Day thing but that's about all. I haven't done much to earn these lunches truly. I have enjoyed them because it keeps my finger in. And I like that.

Allen: I'm trying to think of another question to draw you out about your relationship about the Jr. College and the university.

Burdett: Well, that wistaria arbor was a lovely thing, it really was very pretty and we used to eat our lunch there in the summers I remember, in the spring.

Allen: In '43 that was vandalized and then it came back and it was still there when I came and to my knowledge I don't think we have a wistaria vine on campus now. This is something that has bothered me.

Burdett: The founders should give the school a

Allen: I think I spoke about that the other day, didn't I. I was talking, no it was in another meeting where I was talking about the history. I had had the idea at one time that a wistaria seed be sent to each alumnus or donor with instructions to grow. They are kind of hard.

Burdett: Oh, we wouldn't live to see the thing grow to be three

inches high.

Allen: Someone else started looking into the idea after I started them on it and I don't know where they are now. Something will happen.

Burdett Well, that's a cute idea. But it was really our big event of the year. When you said, did we have dances, I can't remember those but I do remember this wistaria thing. There was lots of preparation and everybody had to have dresses made identical and that kind of stuff. You know, a Delight Merwin was in the class, I think, after me and 'cause I used to play tennis with her a lot. Bud Loewith was in the class before me and Bud went on to Columbia to become quite a basketball player.

Allen: Oh, we had basketball teams at that time, do you recall very many of the games?

Burdett: Did we, no, but I'm sure

Allen: We had a tennis team in '38 and they raised money by selling the used balls after the match at three for 50 cents.

Burdett: Do you have any idea who was on that team?

Allen: Not right at finger tips, no

Burdett: I'm beginning to wonder if we had one because there were a group of us who were avid players.

Allen: I'm sure

Burdett: Bill, I'm think I was on the men's team 'cause there weren't enough girls, I really think so. One of the Ochman's played tennis.

Allen: O.K., I have a tennis schedule for '38. We won a game but I don't have any other scores. In basketball, we had 10 on the varsity and 14 on J.V. and they won four of the games I have scores for. Oh here's a tennis schedule in '39. New Haven Jr. College, Milford Prep, Stamford High School, New Haven Jr. College, Milford Prep, but I don't have any scores.

Burdett: Or any participants, any of the members.

Allen: No participants. I have a schedule from the Scribe and that's all that I have.

Burdett: I'm trying to think of who else played tennis with me.

Allen: But I do not have at that point any names, all I have is scores.

Burdett: I think I was the only girl on the boy's team. For some reason I do. I wish I could remember some of these tournaments.

Allen: Would that be '38 or '39?

Burdett: '39, I think.

Allen: All right, I have a schedule, Milford Prep, Stamford High School, New Haven Jr. College, Harding High School, Central High School, Stratford High School. Does any of that ring a bell?

Burdett: No.

Allen: O.K. Well, one of the little hobbies that I'm doing is trying to complete the athletic record. No one kept any records, really, at that time, they are just non existant.

Burdett: Now I have three letters at home, I didn't bring them in, in that little box of mine. I've must have gotten them for something, it must have been the tennis. I'm trying to think of somebody who was still here who played tennis, who I played tennis with, and I just can't. It seems to me one of the Ochmans played. Stan or Henry.

Allen: Well, that's an interesting side light too. I am very happy to have that part of it.

Burdett: It was a fun place.

Allen: Well, this has been most useful, Ceil, one of the things that I want to do is to make this as human a place as possible because there, it was, and it was when I first came and remained that way for a time. Then we lost it, it became something else. And I want to give that spirit.

Burdett: I think as you get bigger. Here's Dean Scurr between Herren and Ropp, oh and there was another professor who was a Biology teacher.

Allen: Bill Everett

Burdett: Bill Everett. There weren't many.

Allen: Well, this has been most useful, Ceil. I'll turn this off now to conclude this tape.